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SUBJECT: NORTH KORDOFAN STRESSED BY NEIGHBORING DARFUR CONFLICT

REF: A. KHARTOUM 67
[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 275

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: According to numerous Sudanese contacts on a recent trip to the North Kordofan cities of El-Obeid and An-Nahud, the Darfur conflict clearly is stressing the neighboring state's economy and infrastructure. Although North Kordofan shares many of the same factors that bred violence in Darfur, opinions differ as to whether that conflict will spread more significantly. Many praise the Hamar tribal chief's reconciliation program for former Darfur rebels, stating that it could serve as a model for other tribal leaders. END SUMMARY.

DARFUR CONFLICT HARMS KORDOFAN'S ECONOMY

[1](#)2. (U) In a variety of meetings in El-Obeid and An-Nahud with econoff from February 20-24, all contacts emphasized that Darfur's crisis hurts the North Kordofan economy, infrastructure, and government, specifically noting reduced trade, the influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs), and the strain they place on government services. On February 21, the manager of An-Nahud's agricultural crop market, Othman Muhammad Ali, told EconOff that he has seen volume at the market reduced as Darfurian crop and livestock exports to Kordofan have declined. He complained that Kordofan's exports to Darfur, especially of sorghum, peanuts, and general goods, had fallen significantly and affected his business.

[1](#)3. (SBU) On February 23, Abu Agala El-Zagil of the Nahud Information Center told econoff that a number of banks in western North Kordofan, most notably in Ghebeish, decided to close and move away after rebels attacked nearby areas. (Note: After An-Nahud, Ghebeish is the second largest city in West Kordofan. In December 2006, JEM forces attacked Ghebeish killing 45 members of the Popular Defense Forces, after which the Sudanese Armed Forces increased its presence. End Note.) El-Zagil added that some traders are afraid to travel in Western Kordofan and that their purchases from the region have decreased significantly.

[1](#)4. (U) According to local An-Nahud town commissioner Al-Sharif Al-Fadil economic and cultural ties between Kordofan and Darfur have been significantly reduced. Al-Fadil noted that trade between the two regions is natural, as Kordofan was occupied by the Fur people for centuries as part of the Fur sultanate. Al-Fadil, like others, added that before the conflict, trade was significant between the South Darfur capital of Nyala and An-Nahud.

WHILE IDPs STRAIN INFRASTRUCTURE

[1](#)5. (U) Contacts also stated that the influx of internally displaced persons from Darfur into Kordofan has strained its infrastructure, social fabric, and level of government services. In a February 21 meeting with econoff, North Kordofan's Minister of Health, Abd

Al-Hamid Moneim Mansour, estimated that there are "tens of thousands of internally displaced persons from Darfur." He stated that Kordofan always has been a bridge between many different parts of the country, but that it is struggling to provide services to these new residents. "The budget is not enough even to pay for basic services for the people of Kordofan, let alone those from Darfur," said Mansour. On February 20, Al-Rashid Othman Al-Sayyed Abd Al-Baqi, the General Secretary for the Sudanese Businessmen's Association in North Kordofan State stated that squatter camps have started to form outside of El-Obeid consisting primarily of Darfur IDPs.

WILL THE CONFLICT SPREAD TO KORDOFAN?

¶6. (U) According to contacts, many of the same factors that triggered the Darfur conflict exist in Kordofan, including tribal diversity, unresolved issues over grazing rights and agricultural areas, years of drought, and a real water shortage. "The lack of development is the reason for the war in Darfur. If we want to stop Darfur's problems from spreading into Kordofan, we need development," said Abd Al-Hamid Mansour, the Minister of Health of ¶N. Kordofan State. Mansour specifically noted the stress on areas such as Dam Gamad, Ghebeish, and Wad Banda, where tens of thousands of Darfur IDPs and years of drought strain limited resources.

¶7. (U) Muhammad Gomma of An-Nahud's Veteran's Association ("The Martyrs Organization") noted that although the levels of violence in Kordofan are low compared to Darfur, the people of his state also suffer from violence within their borders. According to Gomma, 17 of those killed in the August 2007 Wad Banda attacks by JEM rebels from Darfur were from Nahud. According to Gomma, (who has worked with some of the rebels after their reintegration into society) many rebels told him that they set their sights on Kordofan as it provides the only direct paved road to Khartoum. "For the rebels, Kordofan is the only way to attack the capital," stated Gomma.

¶8. (U) Other contacts were more optimistic, denying that widespread conflict will spread into Kordofan. Dr. Salih Fadel El-Saeed, a World Bank Projects coordinator and Kordofan native, told econoff that the people of Kordofan are peaceful and their mentality differs from those in Darfur. "We have confidence in the police, military and security and they will stop the rebels from coming into Kordofan," stated El-Saeed. Likewise, average citizens of El-Obeid, such as three young unemployed college graduates (Nidal, Nizar, and Muhammad) told econoff at a small tea stand in downtown El-Obeid that although they are very frustrated with the economy and their futures, they do not see the rebels gaining support from young men such as themselves in El-Obeid.

KORDOFAN'S OWN REBELS

¶9. (U) All Kordofan contacts knew of native rebel groups (such as the Kordofan Alliance for Development (KAD) and the Sons of Kordofan Alliance (SKA) - reftel A) as well as prominent rebel leaders hailing from North Kordofan such as Abu Rannat (a native of An-Nahud) and these groups' relationship to the Justice and Equality Movement. The NCP-appointed commissioner of An-Nahud stated that KAD consists mostly of youth who have concluded they must fight for development. He said that KAD leaders lack a wide following, and many of them only recently returned to Sudan after years of hard labor in Libya. "When they came back to Sudan, they felt as though they deserved something and so they took up arms," stated Sharif.

GENERAL ABU RANNAT & JEM

¶10. (U) Almost all contacts were familiar with Brigadier General Ibrahim Abu Rannat, a military commander of the Sons of Kordofan Alliance (SKA) who integrated his forces with the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in January 2008. According to Muhammad Gomma, Abu Rannat lacks extended tribal or familial network in the region, but he does have valued military experience, personal charisma, and local knowledge. Kordofan's Minister of Health Abd Al-Hamid Moneim Mansour, downplayed Abu Rannat's connection to Kordofan, stating that although his grandfather was a mayor of An-Nahud, his family left the area long ago. Abu Agala El-Zagil of the An-Nahud Information Center agreed, "Abu Rannat is not close to the people of Nahud and will not influence them. He does not have a following in the area."

¶11. (U) On February 25, Dr. Tahir Adam, the Speaker of the Legislative Council of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), told econoff by satellite phone (reftel b) that Abu Rannat's leadership is an asset to his movement. Adam, also a native of An-Nahud, said that Abu Rannat has been a lifelong friend and that Abu Rannat's education, military experience, and knowledge of An-Nahud will help JEM's activities in Kordofan. Adam also stated that JEM intends to carry out more operations in Kordofan's oilfields, in the Nuba mountains and near the cities of An-Nahud and El-Obeid.

RECONCILIATION EFFORTS

¶12. (U) Many contacts praised a reconciliation effort led by the local commissioner, the Hamar Tribal Chief (overseeing the largest tribe in North Kordofan), and seventy other local leaders. On January 21, An-Nahud held a public ceremony for eight rebels who rejoined society after being pardoned by the State. According to Muhammad Gomma, an individual who has worked to re-integrate former rebels into society, the reformed rebels include: Hassan Hamad Al-Neel, a former senior rebel leader (who after the signing of the DPA defected from SLM-Minnawi to the JEM Collective Leadership of Bahar Abu Garda); Mohamed Bilal, a former Secretary General of KAD; Mohamed Abdel Ghani, a former military general in JEM; and several other individuals. Gomma stated that there are five other reformed rebels currently in Ghebeish, who have received a general pardon from the state as well as a compensation package (including a car for the group, property, and possible government jobs). Gomma stated that these former rebels have been forgiven by their fellow citizens, although some of them had participated in the Wad Banda and Ghebeish attacks that led to the deaths of many individuals.

¶13. (U) According to Abd Al-Gadir Moniem Mansour, his position as the Nazir (Tribal Chief) of the Hamar Tribe makes him the best negotiator with these rebels, giving him the added authority necessary to gain their trust. "Darfur's problems are due to the lack of local authority and weak government systems that have attempted to replace the traditional system. The traditional authority needs to be empowered." Separately, Gomma of the Veteran's Association agreed saying, "Traditional leaders have a role to play in reconciliation. They are respected, but are not too closely associated with the government." Gomma cautioned, however, that the official pardon and the compensation package must first come from the state.

¶14. (U) Mansour said that after the initial success of his reconciliation program, he has continued his work by calling rebels on their satellite phones, meeting them in person, and providing religious, tribal, and civic justifications for them to turn away from violence. Mansour stated that he has convinced hundreds of rebels to lay down their arms. While he has received some state support, Mansour said that he could do more if the government provided more financial, moral, and logistical support. "What people forget," stated Mansour, "is that forgiveness has to be an important part of the solution to Darfur's problems."

CRITICS OF THE RECONCILIATION PROGRAM

¶15. (U) Abu Agala El-Zagil of the An-Nahud Information Center criticized the reconciliation program, charging that the Nazir is overstepping his authority. "Security is not the role of the Nazir, and this is much bigger than anything he can do," said El-Zagil. According to El-Zagil, most of the rebels are greedy individuals, and the compensation packages they receive will only encourage others to join rebel movements. Dr. Abdel Daïem Abdel Salam of the Information Media Department at Western Kordofan University agreed, saying "The reconciliation efforts are just propaganda, and these rebels should not be rewarded for what they have done, especially with money, land and jobs. For every eight that return to society in this program, another 16 will join the movement."

¶16. (U) Some rebel leaders have rejected these small initiatives, seeking a more comprehensive reconciliation program. On February 25, 2008 "Akhbar Al-Youm" reported that KAD military leader Mohamed El-Balil Eisa speaking in Chad, tentatively agreed to begin a dialogue with the Government of Sudan. Although recognizing the efforts of the Hamar Nazir, Eisa stated that the effort should be bigger than selective negotiations with individuals like Hassan Hamad El-Nil and others who defected from KAD. Eisa stated that

North and South Kordofan should be looked at holistically ("from the south in Abeyi to the north in Sodari, and the east in Jabra to the west El-Toboona,") and not just from the perspective of the Hamar tribe. According to Eisa, the people of Kordofan do not seek power, but they do not want to be neglected while peace agreements (such as the CPA, DPA and ESPA) provide support to other regions of Sudan.

¶17. (U) Dr. Tahir Adam, the Speaker of the Legislative Council of the Justice Equality Movement (JEM) also criticized the reconciliation program saying, "It is not going to work. It is bigger than getting one or two individuals reintegrated into society. The only option for the youth is to topple the government."

¶18. (SBU) COMMENT: Darfur's problems clearly put an economic and social burden on Kordofan. However, measuring the exact extent of that impact is difficult across this huge region. Some of our contacts seemed to exaggerate this burden, believing that their pleas will lead to more aid and attention. With respect to security, El-Obeid is far from the Darfur border and rebel operations conducted east of An-Nahud appear unlikely. If Darfur rebels attempt to conduct operations this far into Kordofan, this would be a significant development in the Darfur conflict - and JEM's attempt to spread it into neighboring Kordofan. For it's part, An-Nahud appears to be a dusty backwater, with an underdeveloped water, electrical, and transportation network. If infrastructure projects promised to An-Nahud are not delivered in 2008 (including the completion of the El-Obeid to An-Nahud road and twenty-five kilometers of paved internal roads) An-Nahud could inspire more young men from Kordofan to follow in the steps of their native rebel leaders Abu Rannat and Tahir Adam.

¶19. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: Mansour, the Hamar Tribal Chief, should be commended for his reconciliation efforts and overall role in Kordofan. Although until now he has not succeeded in returning large numbers of rebels to society, he has been able to recruit significant individuals within rebel movements. As president of the Sudanese Tribal Association, Mansour may be able to encourage other tribal leaders to follow his lead in bringing rebels back into society.

FERNANDEZ